

Developing Sustainable Production Systems for Date Palm in the Gulf Cooperation Council Countries (GCC)

SWOT Analysis Instrument Tool

A SWOT Analysis to
Identifying Strengths, Weaknesses and Constraints for Marketing,
Commercialization and Competitiveness of Date Palm Products in the
GCC Countries

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1. Contextual Background

The project “*Developing Sustainable Production Systems for Date Palm in the Gulf Cooperation Council Countries - GCC*”, funded by the GCC Secretariat, was implemented, in partnership, by ministries of agriculture, agricultural authorities, and agricultural research institutions and universities in the six GCC countries of the Arabian Peninsula (Kingdom of Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, State of Kuwait, State of Qatar, Sultanate of Oman, and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) and the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA). The major objectives of the project are to improve date palm productivity per unit of water and rationalize the use of the available resources so that production becomes sustainable. The project also aims to: i) define the nutritional requirements for the optimal growth of date palm through leaf tissue culture and soil analysis and establish the need to use macro and micro nutrients; ii) to improve date palm field practices and management for a vigorous tree with a high yield and better fruit quality at harvest; iii) to develop sustainable and ecologically sound integrated pest management systems that reduce crop losses caused by major pests and diseases and increase the quality and market value of the dates; iv) to establish efficient post-harvest management protocols, including processing, marketing, and the use of a date palm value added products; v) to assemble a set of tools to enable researchers, extension workers, and growers to share the accumulated information, knowledge, and expertise, and strengthen national institutions and human resource capacity and enhance technology transfer.

There is an evidence on the strategic role that date palm play in the GCC countries. It is the most important income generating crop and contributes significantly to the national economy of many GCC countries. Date fruit have proved to be the critical factor in insuring food and nutritional security during food shortage and crises in desert farming systems and oases; and date palm plays an important role in the development of sustainable agriculture in these desertic zones of Arabian Peninsula as it contributes significantly in increasing the resilience of these areas to climate change.

Despite significant efforts made by the GCC countries, the date sub-sector has an enormous room to grow in the region, and efforts should focus on integrated national and regional strategies. The expansion of the date palm industry is dependent on many aspects which, include; control of pest and diseases; enhancing the quality of date end products; reducing field and post-harvest high losses; formalizing and streamlining market systems; and, developing date value added products and by products. However, If the date palm sector is so important, then a key question to ask would be: *Why the sector is not performing well and less competitive?* It might be because of several constraints and challenges are facing the local and international commercialization and marketing channels of the date palm fruits. At the local level, such challenges are decreasing demand for date fruits, weak post-harvesting transactions, lack of appropriate and attracting boxes for final appearance, no appropriate existing storage system till the marketing of fruits, lack of by-products markets, use of unimproved technologies for fruit packaging and wrapping, no linkage between all key processing date palm actors, lack of expertise and technical staff for date palm manufacturing industries, rural-urban migration, urbanization, no feasibility studies regarding the profitability of the manufacturing industries of date palm products, and reluctance of investors to invest in the date palm sector. At the international level, the international markets are becoming very demanding in terms of standards and norms, mainly for the perishable products such as dates fruits. This will be a challenge for local producers to be competitive in the international markets.

2. Date Palm Value Chain Challenges in the GCC Countries

The assessment of the date palm sector value chain in the GCC countries reveal its low marketing and commercialization performance and absence of competitiveness of the dates produced by most of these countries. This is mainly due to:

- Several planted date varieties are of low quality and not suitable for the regional and international markets.
- Predominance of traditional harvesting and post-harvesting practices and process.
- Lack of know-how of good agricultural practices (GAP) applied to date production.
- Little importance is given to labeling, organic farming, application of geographical indicators, etc.
- Absence of date marketing standards for most of the date varieties produced in the GCC region.
- Most of the produced dates do not conform to the marketing standards of the lucrative high-income markets (USA, EU, etc.) and thus, they are mainly oriented to the less profitable markets of South-West Asia.
- Low knowledge of the international market requirements and quality issues.
- The date standardizing and packing units do not conform to the international standards.
- Important decline in date consumption in the region (i.e., youth).
- Low importance is given to date processing.
- Shortage in national qualified and trained staff & labors.
- Insufficient research and development activities in the date palm sector

This analysis highlighted the need to improve post-harvest handling, marketing, and competitiveness of the date value chain. While production is of critical importance, the date palm value chain is comprised of several post-production components, which will require upgrading for the whole value chain to develop and function efficiently. The key components needing improvement are genetic material, post-harvest handling and processing, date quality, trade and marketing policy and infrastructure, as well as date consumption by emphasizing its nutritional value.

3. Purpose of the SWOT Analysis

Within this framework, the ICARDA date palm project socio economic is conducting a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) with participants from the project in the GCC countries who are actively engaged in promoting the adoption and mainstreaming of date palm farming systems. The purpose of this analysis is to gather-up to date information on the status of the date palm value chain and discuss the challenges and opportunities to improve marketing, commercialization, and competitiveness of the dates and date palm product in these countries. The outcome from this initiative will help decision makers and date palm program planners towards an establishment of an enabling environment for improving production, productivity and quality of dates, including local value chain development and raising awareness to create policies for the improvement of marketing of dates nationally, regionally and globally.

4. Implementation Process of the SWOT Analysis Tool

The SWOT analysis will be carried out through a survey covering the value chain actors of the date palm sector. The overall characteristics of the tool are as follows:

- **Length of the interview:** The interview will last not more than 20-30 minutes.
- **Reason for choosing the interviewee:** You have been identified as an interviewee because you are actively engaged in the date palm sector in your country.
- **Number of interviewees:** 10–15 persons in each country (Researchers, extensionists, input suppliers, producers, dates collectors/brokers, dates wholesale traders and exporters, dates processors, decisions makers, dates retailers, distributors, and retailers, lead farmers, etc.) actively engaged in the date palm sector.
- **Objective of the questionnaire:** The focus of this interview is on questions related to your reflections on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and risks linked to the commercialization and marketing of dates and date palm products in your country:
 - What is already in place that has contributed to improve the marketing, commercialization, and competitiveness of dates and date palm products?
 - What are the challenges that need to be addressed to improve the marketing, commercialization, and competitiveness of dates and date palm products and how?
 - What are the existing and future opportunities to improve the marketing, commercialization, and competitiveness of dates and date palm products and how they can be mobilized?
 - What are the existing and dynamic risks to be guarded against in order to improve the marketing and competitiveness of the date value chain (i.e., dates and date palm products) and what mitigation actions are needed to put in place to overcome these threats?
- **Questionnaire distribution and flow:**
 - A technical synthesis report from this analysis will be made available for all potential stakeholders and decision makers in the date palm sector in the GCC countries.
 - You may have more to say for some questions or may choose not to answer a specific question. In both cases, please feel free to state this and respond to the questions to the best of your knowledge.

5. SWOT Analysis Instrument Tool

The following matrix presents the components of the SWOT analysis through a set of questions. Please provide max 5 responses in bullet points to each one of the questions below.

STRENGTHS Question: What is already in place that is contributed to improve the marketing, commercialization, and competitiveness of dates and date palm products?	WEAKNESSES Question: What are the challenges that need to be addressed to improve the marketing, commercialization, and competitiveness of dates and date palm products and how?
1. 2. 3. 4. 5.	1. 2. 3. 4. 5.
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS

Question: What are the existing and future opportunities to improve the marketing, commercialization, and competitiveness of dates and date palm products and how they can be mobilized?	Question: What are the existing and dynamic risks to be guarded against in order to improve the marketing and competitiveness of the date value chain (i.e., dates and date palm products) and what mitigation actions are needed to put in place to overcome these threats?
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